

## SPECIAL TOPIC: CANON

- A. The Protestant Canon contains all the inspired (see [SPECIAL TOPIC: INSPIRATION](#)) books—the canon is closed! ("the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," Jude 1:3). This is a presuppositional statement.
  1. accepted OT from Jews
  2. twenty-seven books in NT (a progressive historical process)
- B. New Testament authors are connected to Jesus or an Apostle (a progressive historical process).
  1. James and Jude to Jesus (His half-brothers)
  2. Mark to Peter (turned his sermons at Rome into a Gospel)
  3. Luke to Paul  
Hebrews traditionally to Paul
- C. Theological unity with Apostolic teaching (later "rule of faith")
  1. because of the rise of heresy (i.e., adoptionism, Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Montanism)
  2. because of the delayed Second Coming
  3. because of the death of the original twelve Apostles
- D. The permanently and morally changed lives of hearers demonstrated the power of Scripture
- E. The general consensus of the early churches, through a consensus in a large geographical and diverse cultural context, before the major church councils can be seen in the early lists of canonical books.
  1. Origen (A.D. 185-254) asserts that there were four Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles.
  2. The Muratorian Fragment dates between A.D. 180-200 from Rome (the only copy available today is a damaged, late Latin text). It lists the same 27 books as the Protestant NT (but adds Apocalypse of Peter and Shepherd of Hermas).
  3. Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 265-340) introduced a threefold designation (as did Origen) to describe Christian writings:
    - a. "received" and thereby accepted
    - b. "disputed" and thereby differences among churches (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John)
    - c. "spurious" and thereby unaccepted and not to be read in churches.
  4. The Cheltenham list (in Latin) from North Africa (A.D. 360) has the same 27 books (except for Hebrews, James, and Jude [Hebrews is not specifically mentioned, but may be included in Paul's letters]), as the Protestant NT, but in an unusual order.
  5. Athanasius' Easter Letter of A.D. 367 is the first to list exactly the same 27 books as the Protestant NT with no additions or subtractions (notice the late date).
  6. The concept and contents of an authoritative list of unique books was a historical and theological development.
- F. Suggested reading:
  1. *The Canon of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger, published by Oxford Press.
  2. Articles on canon in *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1. pp. 709-745.
  3. *Introduction to the Bible* by William E. Nix and Norman Geisler, published by Moody Press, 1968 (esp. the chart on p. 22)
  4. *Holy Writings - Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* by John Barton, published by Westminster John Knox Press, 1997

G. The Old and New Testaments are the only literary productions of the Ancient Near East that were canonized as especially coming from and revealing Divine purposes. There are no other religious lists which differentiate between canonical (i.e., authoritative) vs. non-canonical religious writings.

How, why, and when did this historical process happen?

1. Was it by the decisions of the church councils of the third and fourth centuries A.D.?
2. Was it by the use of Christian writers of the second century?
3. Was it by the churches of the late first-fourth centuries?

These questions cannot be definitively answered. Catholic and Orthodox believers choose #1, while Protestants choose #2 or #3.

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